



Commonwealth of Virginia

October 7th, 2014

Secretary Sylvia Burwell
Secretary Arne Duncan
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary Burwell and Secretary Duncan:

On behalf of the Commonwealth Council on Childhood Success, Virginia's Early Childhood State Advisory Council, I am writing to inform you of our unwavering support for Virginia's application for a Preschool Development Expansion Grant. One of the top priorities for the Council is expanding access to high quality preschool programs, particularly for our most vulnerable children, and we are confident that the Commonwealth has crafted a strong application, both strategic and sustainable, for such an expansion.

The Commonwealth has a solid public preschool foundation, the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI), upon which we hope to build and improve in the coming years. VPI began serving students in 1996 and currently provides high quality preschool and comprehensive services to more than 18,000 students per year. Despite the demand and support for this program, many Virginia localities face obstacles in providing access to VPI for all eligible four-year-olds. We believe this federal grant provides a unique and much-needed opportunity to help high-need communities overcome barriers to accessing high-quality preschool as well as the ability and responsibility to share these strategies and improvements with communities across the state. In addition to expanding access to preschool for our most at-risk children, the Commonwealth Council on Childhood Success is equally committed to improving the quality of all preschool programs.

As a practicing pediatric neurologist who served in the state legislature for 5 years, and now in my role as Lieutenant Governor and Chair of the Commonwealth Council on Childhood Success, I have witnessed growing support and understanding of the critical importance of the early years and the value of high-quality preschool. Virginia is nationally recognized for its strong public-private early childhood system and long-standing and vibrant business support for school readiness. With the high-level focus of the Council, as well as the creation of a bi-partisan legislative workgroup on early childhood education, I believe Virginia is well-positioned to fully leverage and successfully implement this important grant opportunity.

Building on his belief and commitment that every young Virginian deserves access to the benefits of an early childhood education, Governor McAuliffe established the Council in August 2014 as an integral part of his historic convening of Virginia's first Children's Cabinet. Together, these entities represent the Administration's serious commitment to comprehensively and systemically addressing the health and educational needs of Virginia's children in collaborative and creative ways. The Council includes a wide variety of representatives, including those from the legislature, the business and advocacy communities, relevant program administrators and Commissioners from state agencies, institutions of higher education, and parents.

A number of these representatives have been intimately involved in the development of Virginia's grant application in recent months. Their participation in the Council will provide strong continuity for implementation, should Virginia receive a grant, and for other initiatives around the health and education of young children. The Commonwealth Council on Childhood Success is dedicated to expanding access to high quality preschool for Virginia's at-risk children and stands ready to assist in any way possible. It is our belief that Virginia is worthy of this important grant and our sincere hope that you will agree.

Sincerely,

Ralph S. Northam
Lieutenant Governor of Virginia
Chair, Commonwealth Council on Childhood Success

Encl: Commonwealth Council on Childhood Success Roster

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